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<b>14. ABSTRACT</b> The two large and powerful nations of China and Russia are currently engaged in a strategic partnership which is an aberration in the history between the two countries. Both nations share an aversion to a unipolar world led by the United States and seek to balance the expansion of American power and create a multi-polar international order. They have engaged in security cooperation activities ranging from arms sales and technical support, to military visits and exchanges, to large scale combined and joint military exercises. It is unlikely that this relationship will evolve into a formal military alliance, given the troubled history between China and Russia. The two countries, which share a large common border and some common interests, have numerous conflicting interests, are culturally incompatible with little grassroots affinity, and are each wary of the other, especially as China's power grows and Russia's declines. Both nations value their bilateral relations with the United States, the nature of which bear greatly on the character of the Chinese-Russian relationship. The United States should be vigilant in observing the Chinese-Russian partnership, while cultivating its own bilateral relationships with each country.					
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**NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY**  
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**JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL**



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COOPERATION**

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*Colonel, United States Army*



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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense.

This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.

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## **Abstract**

The two large and powerful nations of China and Russia are currently engaged in a strategic partnership which is an aberration in the troubled history between the two countries. Since the end of the Cold War, China and Russia have cooperated in some ways that are unprecedented in their history. Both nations share an aversion to a unipolar world led by the United States and seek to balance the expansion of American power and create a multi-polar international order. They have engaged in security cooperation activities ranging from arms sales and technical support, to military visits and exchanges, to large scale combined and joint military exercises. Many analysts and observers have explored the possibility of the current Chinese-Russian strategic partnership blossoming into a formal military alliance, which would pose a significant threat to the Western world. Such an alliance is unlikely, given the past history between China and Russia, which is characterized by mistrust and conflict. The two countries, which share a large common border and some common interests, have numerous conflicting interests, are culturally incompatible with little grassroots affinity, and are each wary of the other, especially as China's power grows and Russia's declines. Both nations value their bilateral relations with the United States, the nature of which bear greatly on the character of the Chinese-Russian relationship. The United States should be vigilant in observing the Chinese-Russian partnership, while cultivating its own bilateral relationships with each country.





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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In September of 2016, China and Russia conducted an eight-day combined and joint naval exercise in the South China Sea. The exercise showcased Russian and Chinese surface ships, submarines, fixed wing aircraft, helicopters, and marines with armored vehicles.<sup>1</sup> These forces operated together in a body of water which has been a hot spot for recent tensions in the region, as China has attempted to exert maritime territorial claims. Before the Twenty First Century, military exercises of this kind between Russia and China were unprecedented. Now such endeavors between these two neighboring giants occur annually. These exercises are emblematic of a new era in Chinese-Russian security relations. The character of their recent relationship is an aberration in the history of their interaction.

The long, complicated history of the security relationship between China and Russia is defined largely by suspicion and distrust, and marked by brief periods of both cooperation and sharp conflict. Much of the historical conflict between the two nations has centered on their lengthy and often disputed boundary. Bloodshed has frequently resulted, including the significant conflict on the Ussuri River boundary in 1969, which threatened to explode into a war between China and the Soviet Union.

A brief period of harmonious cooperation existed for approximately ten years after Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communists took power throughout China in October, 1949, and found themselves in an ideological embrace with the Soviet Union, cemented by the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance, and Mutual Assistance, signed in

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<sup>1</sup> Brad Lendon and Katie Hunt, "China, Russia Begin Joint Exercises in South China Sea," CNN, September 12, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/12/asia/china-russia-south-china-sea-exercises/index.html> (accessed November 28, 2016).

February, 1950. The Soviets actively supported China during the Korean War (1950-1953) and Mao and Soviet Premier Josef Stalin seemingly shared a fervor for advancing the communist revolution across the globe. This honeymoon was short, and by 1960 the two nations had acrimoniously parted ways in the Sino-Soviet split, returning to their historical antagonism. China even leveraged the United States in balancing the Soviet Union, responding favorably to President Nixon's overtures in the early 1970s to normalize Chinese-American relations.

After roughly thirty years of mutual animosity since the Sino-Soviet split, China and Russia entered a new era in their relationship at the conclusion of the Cold War in late 1991. Their rapprochement has featured significant military cooperation, including substantial military arms sales from Russia to China, joint military exercises, regular high level meetings between defense officials, and officer exchanges for military education. Not since the 1950s, when China and the Soviet Union actively cooperated under their mutual defense pact, have the two nations had such close defense ties. Elements of the relationship, such as the large scale combined and military exercises, are unprecedented.

The post-Cold War Russian-Chinese strategic partnership and its implications are of significant interest and importance to the United States and its allies, both in Asia and around the world. Undoubtedly China and Russia have improved their relationship, at least in part, in response to the unipolar supremacy of the United States that followed the fall of the Soviet Union. Events like the U.S.-led NATO war in Kosovo in 1999 and the U.S.-led coalition invasion of Iraq in 2003 strengthened and solidified the security relationship between China and Russia as a reaction to perceived American aggression, global dominance, and violations of national sovereignty.

A key question is whether or not China and Russia have entered, or will ultimately enter a new official military alliance which seeks to balance the power of the United States and its allies. Presently, the strategic partnership between Russia and China is of obvious interest and concern to the United States and its partners. However, Chinese-Russian cooperation is not a formal military alliance and it is unlikely that the relationship will develop into such an arrangement. China and Russia will certainly continue to partner in areas in which their interests align, but the long history of suspicion, mistrust, and conflict between these two nations works against a formal defense pact.

China and Russia no longer share the ideology of communism. However, they both are authoritarian governments and harbor a distrust of the intentions and power of the United States, along with a professed reverence for the primacy of national sovereignty in world affairs. They have areas of coinciding interest, but also numerous areas in which their interests diverge. They are quite culturally different from one other and on contrasting trajectories in terms of development and power. Russia is in decline, while China is on the rise, and not all Russians are comfortable with the latter's inexorable ascent.

China and Russia will continue to work together where their interests converge. After all, they are both large, powerful nations, which share a lengthy border and their spheres of influence intersect throughout Asia. By necessity, they must have a relationship and it is better for both parties if the relationship is a warm one. However, China occupies an increasingly dominant position in the relationship, a dynamic which

flips the script on their historical affiliation. Consequently, their relationship may be “warm on the outside, tepid on the inside, and chilly underneath.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Gilbert Rozman, *The Sino-Russian Challenge to the World Order* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 267.

## Chapter 2: Historical Chinese-Russian Security Relations (prior to 1992)

### Early History to the Twentieth Century

The history of the relationship between China and Russia is long and complex. From initial contact in the 1500s, until quite recently, tension between Russia and China over their lengthy borders waxed and waned as a regular source of conflict. As Russia realized its expansionist ambitions in the Far East, it often pursued a “free rider” strategy, taking advantage of periods of Chinese weakness and distraction in order to satisfy its territorial appetite.<sup>1</sup> Their early interactions, marked by the struggle for territory along their frontier, still color their relationship today. National pride and self-image are crucial factors in these two nations’ interactions with one another and the rest of the international community.

For many centuries after Russia formed, China and Russia had little knowledge of each other. Genghis Khan and his Mongol expansion likely led to the first indirect contact between Russia and China. The Mongol Golden Horde invaded Russia in the thirteenth century, burning Moscow and Kiev, leaving an imprint of dread on Russian historical imagination.<sup>2</sup> China and Russia both existed as part of the Mongolian Empire for nearly one hundred forty years, beginning roughly in the year 1237.<sup>3</sup>

As Russia came into its own and began to expand, China had been a flourishing civilization for many centuries. In the 1500s, the Russians pushed past the Ural

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<sup>1</sup> Lowell Dittmer, “The Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership.” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 10, No. 28 (2001): 399.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Tien-Fong Cheng, *A History of Sino-Russian Relations* (Washington DC: Public Affairs Press, 1957), 9-10.

Mountains all the way to the Pacific Ocean, claiming Siberia. The Russians began to make forays into China and two Cossacks were dispatched to meet the Chinese emperor in as early as 1567.

In the 1600s, the Russians desired to open an overland route to China and develop a market for furs and to provide revenue to the Romanov coffers, which had been depleted by sustained warfare with Western Europe.<sup>4</sup> They penetrated into China in the Amur River basin, founding and fortifying a town on the headwaters of the river, called Nerchinsk. They constructed a network of forts and fur trading posts on the rivers in the area, encroaching on the territory of the tribes of the Amur region, which fell under the protection of the Manchu dynasty.<sup>5</sup> Military contact between Russia and China would soon follow.

The Manchu dynasty viewed the Russians in the Amur region as barbarian interlopers and took action in the 1650s to push them back into Siberia. By the end of the 1650s, Manchu forces claimed victory in a decisive battle against the Russians, killing 270 Russian Soldiers and their commander, virtually halting the Russian penetration for a decade.<sup>6</sup> In the 1660s, Russian Cossacks again ventured into the Amur basin, constructing fortresses and trading posts. Eventually, the Manchu emperor took notice and sent emissaries to negotiate a peaceful withdrawal back to Siberia. The Russians failed to comply and by 1682, the Chinese once again prepared for military action against their uninvited Russian guests.

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Rotnem, "The Sino-Russian Strategic Axis: Partners Now, Rivals in History," In *China and International Security, Volume 1* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2014), 182.

<sup>5</sup> Tien-Fong Cheng, 16-17.

<sup>6</sup> Rotnem, 182.



The Chinese proceeded on a campaign of besieging Russian fortresses and outposts. Russian Emperor Peter the Great sent an emissary to Beijing in 1685, requesting a lifting of the latest siege and to discuss their common frontier. The Chinese responded favorably to this overture, setting the stage for peace negotiations, which commenced outside of Nerchinsk. The resulting Treaty of Nerchinsk, signed on August 27, 1689, established the boundary between Siberia and Manchuria and a formal trading relationship between the two countries. As part of the treaty, which largely kept the peace between China and Russia for the next 170 years, the Chinese essentially relinquished some 90,000 square miles of territory.<sup>7</sup> However, they secured the Russians' agreement to destroy their forts and settlements in the Amur basin, having the long-term effect of preserving Chinese territory from further Russian inroads.<sup>8</sup>

The eighteenth century saw relative peace between China and Russia and the two nations saw fit to negotiate additional treaties. The Treaty of Bura in 1727 and the Treaty of Kyakhta in 1728 solidified border demarcation and trade relations. The latter agreement granted Russians the right to permanent residency in Beijing and authorized the building of an Orthodox church in the Chinese capital. The Manchus continued to limit Russian trade, however, allowing Russian caravans to come to the capital only three times per year, with no more than two hundred Russian traders per caravan.<sup>9</sup> The Treaty of Kyakhta largely alleviated tensions between the two neighbors. Border disputes for the

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<sup>7</sup> Neville Maxwell, "How the Sino-Russian Boundary Conflict Was Finally Settled," *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (June 2007): 231.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Rotnem, 185.

next one hundred thirty years were generally resolved peacefully, with the Chinese using trade relations as leverage in negotiations with the Russians.<sup>10</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century, China had begun its “century of humiliation” and experienced a period of significant difficulties, as it was weakened by defeat in the Opium wars, and struggling within as a result of the Taiping rebellion. The Russians took advantage of the situation and once again pushed to colonize the Amur River basin. They established settlements along the coast of the Sea of Okhotsk, which was Chinese territory according to the Treaty of Nerchinsk. By the 1850s, the Russians restored and consolidated their control in the Amur basin against little Chinese resistance. For all intents and purposes, the Russians had scrapped the Treaty of Nerchinsk.

Accordingly, the Russians called for new negotiations regarding the boundary. The resulting agreements were the Treaty of Aigun in 1858 and the Treaty of Peking in 1860. The Chinese have long considered these treaties to be two of the “unequal treaties” that characterized the exploitation of China by European imperial powers from the mid-nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century. These treaties redrew the boundary between China and Russia along the Amur and Ussuri Rivers, cutting China off from the sea north of Korea and ceding large tracts of land to Russia which had been Chinese territory under the Treaty of Nerchinsk. China had lost land and privileges to Russia, without gaining any true concessions from the other side. For example, Russia maintained consular jurisdiction and most-favored-nation trading status while China did not enjoy the same status in Russia.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Rotnem, 185.

<sup>11</sup> Tien-Fong Cheng, 37.

## The Twentieth Century until the Sino-Soviet Split

In the early twentieth century, the Russian attention to its Far East was lessened by several events. The Russians were defeated in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, they experienced the Russian revolution of 1905, fought in World War I, and finally experienced the communist revolution and resulting civil war. However, the Russians did encourage the Mongols to rebel against China and subsequently established a protectorate over Outer Mongolia in 1911, essentially picking off Mongolia from Chinese rule.

In 1919, soon after the Russian communist revolution, the Soviet commissar for foreign affairs, Leo Karakhan, announced that the Soviet government would renounce all of the Tsar's treaties, to include their territorial seizures in China. Unfortunately for China, the affected territory was not actually in Soviet possession, but was controlled by the White Russian counterrevolutionary forces. By the time the Soviets had defeated their rivals and gained control of all Russian territory, Moscow ignored the Karakhan declaration and consolidated the Russian empire as the Soviet Union. Many Russians and observers in Europe expected that Outer Mongolia and Manchuria would also ultimately become Russian territory.<sup>12</sup> These views and the failure of the Soviets to follow through on the Karakhan declaration raised the ire of many Chinese elites and gave them a resolve to ultimately regain these lands that the Russians now possessed.<sup>13</sup>

During the 1920s, the Soviets and Nationalist China actually engaged in security cooperation activities, as Chiang Kai-shek sought to consolidate and maintain his power. In 1925, the Soviets had more than 1,000 advisers in China and Soviet Field Marshal Vasily Blucher had essentially assumed operational leadership of the Kuomintang forces

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<sup>12</sup> Maxwell, 234.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

and wrote many of the directives himself.<sup>14</sup> Ultimately, Chiang decided he must purge his armed forces of all communist influence as he dealt with the burgeoning Chinese Communist Party. Thus, he severed all relations with the Soviet Union and all of the Russian advisers departed China by the end of 1927 and Nationalist China's diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union were officially broken.<sup>15</sup>

During World War II, Russia and China put aside their historical mistrust in the interest of opposing the Japanese Empire during its aggressive expansion in Asia, notably in China. The Soviets provided some level of support to the Chinese against the Japanese, claiming that more than one hundred Soviet pilots fell in battle against the Japanese from 1937-1941, and that by the end of 1939, the Soviets had furnished more than 1,000 planes to China and more than 2,000 Soviet pilots had rotated through service in support of the Chinese.<sup>16</sup> Soviet support dried up once the Soviets began fighting World War II against the Germans on the Eastern Front. After the German defeat, the Soviets officially declared war against Japan and began an offensive into Manchuria on August 9, 1945. The Soviets also signed a Treaty of Friendship with the Nationalist Chinese government in 1945.

Throughout the Chinese Civil War between the Nationalist and Communist forces, the Soviets were pragmatic in their outlook. Stalin maintained official diplomatic relations with the Nationalist government while simultaneously providing assistance to the Communist forces. This two-faced policy may be explained by Stalin's uncertainty at the outcome of the civil war, but he may have wanted China to remain weak and divided.

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<sup>14</sup> James C. Bowden, "Soviet Military Aid to Nationalist China, 1923-41," In *Sino-Soviet Military Relations* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1966), 50.

<sup>15</sup> Bowden, 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

Some evidence suggests that Stalin urged the Chinese Communists to form a coalition with the Nationalists, giving weight to the notion that Stalin preferred a weak China over which he had significant leverage.<sup>17</sup> When the Soviets withdrew from Manchuria in 1946, they allowed the Chinese Communists to seize a significant amount of territory. However, in a shrewd move, the Soviets stripped Manchuria of its industrial assets to the detriment of both antagonists in the civil war.<sup>18</sup> The Soviet Union proved on numerous occasions that, despite ideological fraternalism, it was willing to sacrifice the interests of the Chinese Communists in favor of its own coldly calculated national interest.<sup>19</sup>

When Mao Zedong and his communist regime ultimately assumed the governance of China, he sought to cooperate with the Soviet Union as comrades in the global communist revolution. He vowed to seek recognition from Western governments only after the People's Republic of China (PRC) established strong ties with the Soviet Union and other anti-Western nations. China would "lean to one side" and establish diplomatic ties with the Soviets on the basis of mutual respect and mutual interest.<sup>20</sup> Mao also resolved to observe China's standing treaty obligations, even if he considered them to be "unequal treaties." Consequently, he accepted that Chinese territory ceded to the Russians by the Treaty of Peking now legally belonged to the Soviet Union. Mao was further pushed into the Soviet camp after his hopes of unifying all of China were dashed when U.S. President Harry Truman deployed the U.S. Seventh Fleet to the Taiwan Strait in order to preserve Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist government which had fled to Taiwan.

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<sup>17</sup> Raymond L. Garthoff, "Sino-Soviet Military Relations, 1945-66," In *Sino-Soviet Military Relations* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers, 1966), 82-83.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>19</sup> Bowden, 44.

<sup>20</sup> Peng Deng, "Embracing the Polar Bear?—Sino-Russian Relations in the 1990s," *Journal of Third World Studies* Vol. 19, No. 2 (Fall 2002), 114.

The Chinese came to see the United States as its main enemy and the U.S. government followed a sought to contain the Chinese revolution.<sup>21</sup>

The PRC and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) embarked on an era of unprecedented security cooperation. Stalin hosted Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai for two months in Moscow to discuss their future relationship. The result of these discussions was the Treaty of Friendship, Mutual Assistance, and Alliance, signed on February 14, 1950. Included in the agreement was an economic development loan from the Soviets over \$300 million.<sup>22</sup> The Soviets also established a military mission in Beijing and sent an estimated 3,000 Soviet advisers to China, along with a number of obsolete combat aircraft.<sup>23</sup> The strength of this alliance would be put to the test as the Korean peninsula erupted in war later in the year, as North Korea, with Soviet blessing, attacked to the South in the hopes of unifying the peninsula under the communist banner.

After the American intervention in Korea, the Chinese watched with great interest. When the tide turned against the North Koreans after General Douglas MacArthur's masterful Inchon landings, the Chinese leaned strongly toward intervention should the United Nations (U.N.) forces cross the thirty eighth parallel. Mao and Stalin conferred and the Soviets encouraged Chinese intervention, but Stalin was hesitant to provide Soviet air cover for fear of sparking a wider war with the United States. The Soviets did agree to provide comprehensive support to the Chinese forces in North Korea and Stalin finally committed Soviet air power twelve days after the Chinese began their campaign. The Soviets provided robust air support, claiming that a total of 72,000 Soviet

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Garthoff, 84.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 85.

airmen were involved in combat and shot down 1,300 enemy aircraft in air-to-air combat and with antiaircraft guns, while losing 335 planes and 120 pilots.<sup>24</sup> The Soviets also provided the Chinese, who struggled to logistically sustain their forces, with vehicles, thousands of tons of supplies, and air force advisers along with hundreds of combat aircraft.<sup>25</sup> By December 1951, the Soviets had supplied the Chinese with approximately 700 MiG-15 fighters.<sup>26</sup> Throughout the war, Soviet assistance was crucial to the Chinese ability to sustain the campaign.

The Korean War was the apex of the alliance between the PRC and the USSR. Except for their cooperation during the war, there is no evidence of any close military cooperation and coordination for training and operations during this period.<sup>27</sup> Despite the Soviet-Chinese ideological bond, tensions existed under the surface. The Chinese were very much the junior partner in the arrangement, which Mao had described as a “product of quarrels.” Chinese leaders grew to resent what they perceived as condescension by Soviet leaders. Mao and his top subordinates viewed their relationship with the Soviets as an expression of international communist solidarity, which may have given them unrealistic expectations concerning Moscow’s commitment to the alliance.<sup>28</sup> Stalin’s death in 1953 marked the beginning of the end to the honeymoon of the alliance and the two nations inexorably slid toward an acrimonious split.

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<sup>24</sup> Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *Mao and the Sino-Soviet Partnership, 1945-1959* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015), 87.

<sup>25</sup> Shen and Xia, 87-88.

<sup>26</sup> Garthoff, 85.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 88.

<sup>28</sup> Deng, 114-115.

## The Sino-Soviet Split to the End of the Cold War

Throughout the 1950s, the Soviets continued to aid the Chinese in weapons development, to include nuclear weapons development. However, at some point in 1957-1958, the Soviets apparently disclosed conditions for their assistance in the nuclear arena, which would require the Chinese to cede control of their nuclear arsenal in a joint enterprise with the Soviets. The Chinese rejected these conditions.<sup>29</sup> The Chinese continued to press the Russians to provide them with nuclear weapons and the Soviets refused.<sup>30</sup>

In 1958, Mao rebuffed a Russian request to build a joint submarine communications and repair facility in Chinese waters. Consequently, new Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev recalled all Soviet advisers and technicians from China, including those aiding in the nuclear program. In his memoirs, former Soviet premier Mikhail Gorbachev asserts that this decision played a large role in souring Sino-Soviet relations.<sup>31</sup> This withdrawal of personnel exacerbated the economic difficulties the Chinese were experiencing as a result of the disastrous Great Leap Forward that Mao had instituted to rapidly modernize the Chinese economy and industrial base.<sup>32</sup> By 1960, the Soviets had virtually ceased all military and economic assistance to China, resulting in essentially no Sino-Soviet military relationship.

The relationship steadily unraveled for a variety of reasons, all underscored by the historical mutual mistrust between the two giant neighbors. The Soviets were dismayed at

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<sup>29</sup> Garthoff, 90.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Rotnem, 190.

<sup>32</sup> Sergey Radchenko, *Two Suns in the Heavens* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2009), 14.



Mao's radical views on international relations and his desire to have a showdown with the West, which they found troublesome as they sought *détente* with the United States.<sup>33</sup> Mao had been agreeable to deferring to Stalin as the leader of international communism, but after Stalin's death he became critical of Khrushchev's willingness to make agreements with the West.<sup>34</sup> Mao's callousness at the potential costs of nuclear war concerned the Soviets to the point that, in 1964, they considered a preemptive strike to destroy China's nuclear capabilities after the Chinese had successfully tested their first atomic device.<sup>35</sup> In his zeal, Mao seemed to place the communist revolution above all else, including peace.<sup>36</sup> Mao and Stalin had been very much cut from the same cloth, but subsequent Soviet leaders denounced much of Stalinism and clearly differed from Mao in many aspects of their international outlooks.

Old grievances contributed to the Sino-Soviet split. After Mao accused Khrushchev of "adventurism" and "capitulationism" after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, Khrushchev responded by accusing China of acquiescing to Western powers by holding to the treaty that allowed the British to retain control of Hong Kong. Beijing responded by pointing out Soviet hypocrisy, wrapped in historic angst about the border—if it would be acceptable for the Chinese to break the treaty with the British and retake Hong Kong, then it should be acceptable for the Chinese to break the "unequal" Treaty of Peking and retake the lands ceded to the Tsar.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Deng, 115.

<sup>34</sup> Rotnem, 189.

<sup>35</sup> Rotnem, 190.

<sup>36</sup> Garthoff, 177.

<sup>37</sup> Maxwell, 242-243.

The gap continued to widen throughout the 1960s. The acrimony continued in 1965, as the Chinese propaganda arm accused the Soviets of all manner of betrayal of communist principles and refused to cooperate with the Soviets in their plans to oppose the U.S. intervention in Vietnam.<sup>38</sup> Chinese leaders were alarmed by the Brezhnev Doctrine which justified Russian aggression, including their invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and perhaps wondered if China might become a target of Soviet imperial aggression.<sup>39</sup>

The Russian-Chinese boundary continued to be a source of conflict. Both nations committed large numbers of forces to securing the border and tensions escalated to the boiling point in March, 1969. A border skirmish erupted along the Ussuri River resulting in more than 1,000 casualties.<sup>40</sup> This battle sparked action on the length of the Sino-Soviet borders, with artillery barrages traded back and forth for weeks afterward. The Chinese correctly determined they had taught the Soviets a lesson that China would not bow to territorial aggression, which caused Soviet leaders to worry about large-scale Chinese movement into Soviet territory.<sup>41</sup>

As the 1970s dawned, China and Soviet Russia were neither friends nor allies. Throughout the decade, China consistently rejected Moscow's initiatives to hold bilateral talks, insisting that border issues must be resolved first. The Soviet government did not hesitate in supporting China's rivals, from India to Vietnam, and even made friendly overtures to the Chinese Nationalist government in Taiwan.<sup>42</sup> As a response to the Soviet

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<sup>38</sup> Radchenko, 165.

<sup>39</sup> Deng, 116.

<sup>40</sup> Rotnem, 191.

<sup>41</sup> Maxwell, 248-249.

<sup>42</sup> Deng, 116.

buildup on their border in the late 1960s, the Chinese made a decidedly realist move and agreed to rapprochement with a powerful adversary of their Russian adversary—the United States.<sup>43</sup> During the Chinese-Vietnamese border war in 1979, the United States supported China while the Soviets condemned the Chinese and threatened to intervene on behalf of the Vietnamese.<sup>44</sup> Soviet Premier Brezhnev was greatly troubled with the threat of China and put 80 Soviet divisions in the border region and invested heavily in developing the Soviet Pacific Fleet, to which Mao reciprocated by putting more than a million Chinese soldiers along the border.<sup>45</sup>

The border, historically a festering sore—especially for China—would remain an area of tension. For the Chinese, the boundary was the physical symbol of its failure to fend off European imperialism, while for the Russians it was a symbol of their great power status.<sup>46</sup> Each nation continued to spend a significant number of military resources to guard their lengthy shared border. For example, in 1985, the Soviet Union still had 52 divisions positioned along the Sino-Soviet frontier, while the Chinese had 74 divisions.<sup>47</sup>

In the 1980s, signs of a thaw in relations between China and the Soviet Union emerged. Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev made overtures to Beijing and established the most positive contact with the Chinese since the Sino-Soviet split. He developed respect and personal trust with Chinese leaders, but distrust between the two nations on the intergovernmental level remained, with Chinese officials continually reminding Soviet officials about the injustices done to China by the “unequal treaties” of the

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<sup>43</sup> Andrew C. Kuchins, *Russia after the Fall* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 209.

<sup>44</sup> Deng, 117-118.

<sup>45</sup> Rotnem, 191.

<sup>46</sup> Maxwell, 234.

<sup>47</sup> Gerald Segal, *Sino-Soviet Relations After Mao* (Dorchester: The Dorset Press, 1985), 16.

nineteenth century, which reinforced Russian skepticism at the possibility of building partnership with China.<sup>48</sup>

Western recriminations and sanctions against China over human rights violations after the Tiananmen Square crackdown in 1989 created an opening for increased Chinese-Soviet interaction. Western investment in China dropped by 22 per cent in the first half of 1990, creating an opportunity for the Soviet Union to fill the vacuum.<sup>49</sup> However, Chinese and Russian identities remained far apart, especially when the Soviet Union dissolved in December, 1991. China's leaders came to regard Gorbachev as a traitor (and possibly an agent of the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency), and Russian President Boris Yeltsin an enemy of socialism and deserving of blame for the USSR's collapse and Russia's movement to the West.<sup>50</sup> The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China, while both communist nations, had been bitter rivals for more than thirty years. Ironically, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and Russia's conversion away from communism, they would begin to build a cooperative security relationship that in many ways is unprecedented in the long history of their association.

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<sup>48</sup> Christina Yeung and Nebojsa Bjelakovic, "The Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: Views from Beijing and Moscow," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (April-June 2010): 262.

<sup>49</sup> Dittmer, 406.

<sup>50</sup> Gilbert Rozman, *The Sino-Russian Challenge to the World Order* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2014), 243.

### Chapter 3: Current Chinese-Russian Security Relations

#### Chinese-Russian Rapprochement after the Cold War

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union ended the Cold War, Russian Federation President Boris Yeltsin continued a policy begun under Mikhail Gorbachev of cultivating better relations with China. The Chinese soon indicated their receptiveness to working with Yeltsin to improve relations and Yeltsin travelled to Beijing in December 1992 to meet with Chinese leaders. Yeltsin and Chinese leader Jiang Zemin ultimately signed a joint communique with the main themes of opposing the U.S. imposition of a unipolar world, opposition to interference in the internal affairs of independent states for humanitarian or any other reasons, and a promise of Moscow and Beijing working together on international problems.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the 1990s, the relationship between the two nations evolved from initial normalization of relations, to becoming friends and good neighbors, to a constructive and ultimately strategic partnership.<sup>2</sup>

Several factors drove the Chinese and Russians closer together. Given Russia's new, reduced position on the geopolitical stage, it is not surprising that Yeltsin sought to promote positive relations with China. As it transitioned its government and economy, Russia desired to reduce security threats from abroad. Both China and Russia wished to minimize the threat, and corresponding military investment, on their common border. Additionally, and most importantly, both nations were vehemently opposed to the imposition of a unipolar world by the United States. They had observed the U.S.-led

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<sup>1</sup> Alexander V. Nemets and John L. Scherer, *Sino-Russian Military Relations: The Fate of Taiwan and the New Geopolitics* (The Authors: 2000), 89.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Y.S. Cheng, "Challenges to China's Russian Policy in Early 21<sup>st</sup> Century," *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (2004): 483.

coalition during the Persian Gulf War in 1991 and later interventions in the former Yugoslavia, to include the bombing of Kosovo in 1999. Leaders from both nations began making similar statements against their perception of U.S. expansionism and hegemony.

Russian leaders emphasized their preference for a multipolar international order in apparent recognition of Russia's inability to balance the United States by itself.<sup>3</sup> China reinforced Russian calls for multi-polarity and, in April 1997, signed a Russian-Chinese Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New World Order, which indirectly pointed to the United States with a warning against nations seeking hegemony and a monopoly on international affairs.<sup>4</sup> In January 2000, Russian and Chinese defense ministers agreed that NATO was becoming "an interventionist and offensive political and military bloc," and subsequently signed a Memorandum of Mutual Understanding between the Defense Ministries on Further Strengthening Cooperation in the Military Field.<sup>5</sup> Their shared concern about U.S. power, combined with Russia's sense of vulnerability after the collapse of the Soviet Union and China's relative isolation after the Tiananmen Square massacre, were catalysts to China and Russia becoming closer.<sup>6</sup>

This decade of improved dialogue and relations resulted in a treaty signed by both nations in July, 2001. This agreement, the Russian-Chinese Treaty of Good-Nighborliness and Friendly Co-operation, was driven by a desire for peace on the border and an increase in trade between the two nations.<sup>7</sup> The agreement does not include

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<sup>3</sup> Helen Belopolsky, *Russia and the Challengers* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2009), 94.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 336.

<sup>7</sup> Herman Pirchner, Jr., "The Uncertain Future: Sino-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Fall 2008): 310.

security guarantees, nor does it lay the framework for a formal military alliance. The agreement is the first of its kind signed between the two nations since 1950 and demonstrates Russia and China's shared antipathy toward a unipolar world.<sup>8</sup>

China and Russia agreed to ameliorate border concerns and broadly solved their border issues through a series of agreements in 1991, 1994, 1996, and 1997.<sup>9</sup> Both sides made modest concessions in these agreements and the negotiations proceeded largely without acrimony. The most recent border agreement was signed in 2005 in Vladivostok and is notable in that the Russians ceded territory on one of the large islands at the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers near the Russian city of Khabarovsk.<sup>10</sup> These agreements allowed both nations to significantly reduce their military presence on the border and focus elsewhere.

#### Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

In 1994, China and Russia, along with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, established the Shanghai Five. This meeting demonstrated the desire for Russia and China to work together and China's desire to engage with Russia to foster cooperation on China's northwestern border.<sup>11</sup> In 2001, the association between these five nations was formalized by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The purpose of the SCO is to promote cooperation in Central Asia in security matters and other areas of common interest. The SCO serves to reinforce the bilateral relationship between Moscow and

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<sup>8</sup> Jeffrey Mankoff, *Russian Foreign Policy* (Lanham: Bowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), 204.

<sup>9</sup> John Berryman, "Russia and China in the New Central Asia: The Security Agenda," In *Russia: Reemerging Great Power* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 158.

<sup>10</sup> Neville Maxwell, "How the Sino-Russian Boundary Conflict Was Finally Settled," *Critical Asian Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (June 2007): 252.

<sup>11</sup> Jacques, 266-267.

Beijing, focusing on the areas in the region where their interests overlap: combatting terrorism, separatism, extremism, and containing American presence.<sup>12</sup> The SCO provides both China and Russia a platform from which to articulate their arguments against American hegemony and their desire for a multipolar world.<sup>13</sup> Recognizing China's rise, the SCO provides Russia with the opportunity to monitor and influence China's activities in Central Asia.<sup>14</sup>

The SCO's cooperation has yielded tangible results in combatting terrorism. The SCO established a Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) to address terrorism in the region. The RATS has continuously improved its effectiveness. During a three-year phase beginning in 2007, law enforcement authorities from across the SCO nations stopped preparations for more than 500 terrorist/extremist crimes, destroyed over 440 terrorist training bases, killed or captured more than 1,050 members of international terrorist organizations, seized 654 improvised explosive devices along with over 5,000 firearms, 46 tons of explosives, and over half a million rounds of ammunition.<sup>15</sup> Despite such success, China has shown reluctance to allow the SCO to become a military bloc against any outside actor, with Russia holding military matters as most important in its SCO dealings.<sup>16</sup>

The SCO provides China and Russia with the opportunity to strengthen their positions on issues internationally. For example, the SCO foreign ministers met in

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<sup>12</sup> Liselotte Odgaard, *China and Coexistence* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012), 106-107.

<sup>13</sup> Berryman, 158.

<sup>14</sup> Niklas Swanstrom, "Sino-Russian Relations at the Start of the New Millennium in Central Asia and Beyond," *Journal of Contemporary China*. Vol. 23, No. 87 (May 2014): 485.

<sup>15</sup> Yu Bin, "China-Russia Relations: Politics of Reluctant Allies," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (September 2016): 132.

<sup>16</sup> Swanstrom, 486.



Tashkent in May 2016 and issued a joint statement that supported China's position in the South China Sea, which was later reinforced separately when the Russian Foreign Ministry reiterated its support.<sup>17</sup> The Russian Federation's National Security Strategy published in 2015 expresses Russia's desire to build up the political and economic potential of the SCO and to leverage it to take practical actions.<sup>18</sup> Likewise, China's National Military Strategy of 2015 states that "China's armed forces will work to further defense and security cooperation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)."<sup>19</sup> The SCO serves as a useful vehicle for both China and Russia to further their interests in Central Asia.

#### The Nature of Contemporary Chinese-Russian Relations

At present, China and Russia both see the benefit of a positive a relationship and partnership in areas of common interest. China, in their National Military Strategy (2015) and Russia, in their National Security Strategy (2015) both prominently highlight their bilateral relationship. Their union is based upon several key factors. The first is economic prosperity. China needs raw materials and relatively inexpensive weapons, which Russia can provide. Russia's defense industry is a key component of its economy, so its arms sales to China are essential. The second is national security—each nation is more secure if they do not consider each other to be enemies or national security threats, at least as far as they state in their policies and pronouncements. Their military cooperation also permits them to influence regional order and send signals to the United States and its

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<sup>17</sup> Bin, "China-Russia Relations: Politics of Reluctant Allies," 133.

<sup>18</sup> Russian President, *National Security Strategy*, Moscow, December 2015, paragraph 92.

<sup>19</sup> Government of the People's Republic of China, The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *Military Strategy*. Beijing, May 2015, paragraph VI.

allies. The third is diplomatic—Russia and China are united in their opposition to American unipolar hegemony and desire the existence of a multipolar international order. Consequently, they regularly support each other when dealing with international issues in global and regional organizations like the United Nations Security Council or the SCO.

Russia and China need each other, but each is on a different trajectory. Russia clings to its self-image as a great power, but it is declining in most respects. China, on the other hand, is rising by nearly all metrics and is slowly, but surely, exerting greater influence in its region and globally. Their partnership is flexible, allowing each country to pursue regional agendas, without a binding security obligation.<sup>20</sup> If not already there, China will ultimately find itself in the superior position in their relationship with Russia, for the first time in modern history. Moscow needs Beijing to show the rest of the world that Russia is still important, while China views the relationship as a low-cost way to mollify Russia, reducing threats between the two and allowing cooperation in areas of overlapping interest.<sup>21</sup> Arguably, Russia needs China more than China needs Russia.

### The Economic Relationship

Russia and China share an important economic relationship. Russia requires trading partners for its goods (particularly military hardware) and raw materials, and China is a hungry customer for both. After the Cold War, trade between China and Russia grew rapidly, increasing by a factor of five between 2000 and 2007.<sup>22</sup> In 2011,

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<sup>20</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Chinese Strategy and Military Power in 2014* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2014), 64.

<sup>21</sup> Jeffrey Mankoff, “The Wary Chinese-Russian Partnership.” *The New York Times* (July 11, 2013). <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/07/12/opinion/global/the-wary-chinese-russian-partnership.html> (accessed December 19, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Jacques, 338.

China became Russia's largest trading partner and in 2014 alone, China's investment in Russia grew by 80 per cent.<sup>23</sup> China's burgeoning economy requires massive raw materials and energy, and it is willing to buy them from Russia. Consequently, Russian elites fear they will become simply a raw materials source for China.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, Russia is not satisfied with the composition of their trade with China, as they seek to expand it. For example, raw materials and energy comprised 48.5 per cent of Russia's total exports to China in 2010.<sup>25</sup>

Economically, Russia and China are moving in opposite directions. During the decade of the 1990s, Russian gross domestic product (GDP) declined by 47 per cent, while China's increased by 152 per cent.<sup>26</sup> China is clearly in the superior economic position with respect to Russia. In 2010, China's GDP was five times larger than Russia's, and in 2014, China had the second highest GDP in the world, while Russia had the tenth highest.<sup>27</sup> Russia and China's economic interaction will remain crucial for both in the future, although China finds itself with greater economic leverage in the relationship. Russia clearly recognizes that the Chinese economy is strong and growing. President Vladimir Putin expressed that the Chinese economic growth was not a threat to Russia, but that his country should seize "a chance to catch the Chinese wind in the sails of [the Russian] economy."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Fu Ying, "How China Sees Russia," *Foreign Affairs* Vol. 95, No. 1 (January/February 2016): 98.

<sup>24</sup> Stephen Blank, "The Context of Russo-Chinese Military Relations," *American Foreign Policy Interests* Vol. 35, No. 5 (September/October 2013): 251.

<sup>25</sup> Swanstrom, 484.

<sup>26</sup> Richard Weitz, "Why Russia and China Have Not Formed an Anti-American Alliance," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2003): 52.

<sup>27</sup> Geir Flikke, "Sino-Russian Relations: Status Exchange or Imbalanced Relationship?" *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 63, No. 3 (May/June 2016): 160.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

The Chinese desire to increase their economic reach across the globe. One initiative to that end is their “One Belt, One Road” policy, which seeks to revive the Old Silk Road land route to Europe, as well as a proposed Maritime Silk Road that connects ports of various countries (like a “string of pearls”). A New Silk Road has the potential to significantly reduce transit times for Chinese goods to Europe—6,379 kilometers overland instead of a 26,000 kilometer journey by sea.<sup>29</sup> To these ends, China has made infrastructure investments in countries along these routes. By June 2016, Chinese President Xi Jinping had signed numerous deals with more than seventy countries and international organizations for construction projects to support the belt and road, investing a total of \$14 billion and creating roughly 60,000 local jobs.<sup>30</sup> However, Russia is likely to be negatively affected if the New Silk Road comes to fruition, more politically than economically, as it would be “bypassed and reduced to a bystander.”<sup>31</sup>

## The Military Relationship

### Arms Sales

Since the Cold War’s end, Russia and China have continued to strengthen their relationship and are engaged in substantial military cooperation, including arms sales, joint exercises, and military-to-military contacts and exchanges. Improved relations have allowed the two nations to reduce expenditures of resources focused on defense against each other, while allowing them to reinforce one another where their interests overlap, particularly where it concerns the United States’ use of power. In some ways, Russian-

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<sup>29</sup> Swanstrom, 487.

<sup>30</sup> Bin, “China-Russia Relations: Politics of Reluctant Allies,” 138.

<sup>31</sup> Swanstrom, 487.

Chinese military cooperation since the Cold War is unprecedented in the history of the relationship between the two nations.

At the Cold War's conclusion, Russian arms sales to China increased significantly. Arms sales between the two are important for both countries. The Russian defense industry is crucial to the Russian economy overall, as one of the few sectors that can build and export finished products.<sup>32</sup> Furthermore, the Russian defense industry cannot survive if it only supplies the Russian armed forces.<sup>33</sup> From China's perspective, Russia is the appropriate source for weapons because Moscow is willing to be flexible in the method of payment (i.e. barter trade), their weapons are largely compatible with the former Soviet weapons that the Chinese possess, and Russia does not attach political strings to its arms exports to China.<sup>34</sup> Russia needs a market for its arms and the Chinese are willing customers as they attempt to modernize the People's Liberation Army (PLA).

Russian arms sales to China reached significant levels in 1995, when Russia and China agreed to a series of agreements that sent several dozen Su-27 jet fighters, a number of S-300 air defense systems, and several Kilo-class diesel-electric submarines to China.<sup>35</sup> By 1996, China became Russia's largest customer for arms, accounting for roughly 42 per cent of Russian arms exports.<sup>36</sup> From 1990 to 1996, 72 per cent of the arms imported by China came from Russia.<sup>37</sup> By 1996, Russia assisted Chinese ICBM and nuclear warhead development and also provided technology to China for manned

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<sup>32</sup> Kevin Ryan, "Russo-Chinese Defense Relations: The View from Moscow," In *The Future of China-Russia Relations* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 187.

<sup>33</sup> Stephen Blank, *The Dynamics of Russian Weapons Sales to China* (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1997), 1.

<sup>34</sup> Jing-Dong Yuan, "Sino-Russian Defense Ties: The View from Beijing," In *The Future of China-Russia Relations* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 207-208.

<sup>35</sup> Nemets and Scherer, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Belopolsky, 73.

<sup>37</sup> Nemets and Scherer, 4.

space vehicles and rocket boosters capable of lifting up to 20 tons into low earth orbit.<sup>38</sup> It was during this year that China and Russia concluded a summit proclaiming a strategic partnership and setting the stage for significant arms sales going forward. By the middle of 1997, as part of their newfound partnership, China and Russia began jointly developing weapons technologies.

China ultimately prefers, for the most part, to acquire technology, rather than finished goods. In 1997 and 1998, China and Russia began to negotiate over Russia's desire that 70 per cent of its weapons exports were finished goods, and only 30 per cent as technology for development, assembly, or manufacturing in China. Conversely, the Chinese insisted on the opposite ratio, recognizing the advantage, in the long run, of acquiring technology rather than finished high-tech weapon systems.<sup>39</sup> The Chinese have demonstrated the ability to copy Russian systems and sell them to other countries under Chinese "brand names," causing considerable tension with the Russians.<sup>40</sup> China's increasing industrial capacity allows it to domestically produce more weapons, provided it is able to develop, or more likely acquire, the necessary technology. In addition, China has used its leverage to, in some instances, reverse Russia's policy not selling weapons to China that are superior to those it sells to India.<sup>41</sup>

From 1992 to 2006, Russia-to-China arms sales held steady, with 40 percent of Russian exports going to China, and Russian arms comprising 84 per cent of Chinese weapon imports.<sup>42</sup> Arms deals for major weapon systems have been common. For

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<sup>38</sup> Nemets and Scherer., 2.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>40</sup> Blank, "The Context of Russo-Chinese Military Relations," 251.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>42</sup> Swanstrom, 491.

example, in 2002 China reportedly ordered two Russian destroyers, eight Kilo-class submarines, and was attempting to buy forty Su-30 fighter bombers.<sup>43</sup> Today, China remains an important customer for the Russian arms industry. In April 2014, Russia agreed in principle with China to sell S-400 air defense missiles, the range of which would permit China to dominate Taiwan's airspace.<sup>44</sup> More recently, in November 2015, China and Russia entered into an arms contract that to purchase 24 Su-35 combat aircraft—the first foreign nation to purchase this aircraft.<sup>45</sup>

In recent years, Russian arms sales to China have somewhat declined and levelled off. As of 2014, Russian arms sales to China have totaled roughly \$2 billion annually.<sup>46</sup> The Russian defense industry still depends on weapon exports to China, as there is simply not enough demand for high tech weapon systems within Russia alone to justify the large capital investments required for the research and development of new weapon systems.<sup>47</sup> Weapon sales remain an important part of the bilateral relationship between the two nations and are one of the most visible manifestations of the strategic partnership in which they are now engaged.

### **Joint Training Exercises**

In August 2005, for the first time in forty years, Russian and Chinese armed forces conducted joint military exercises, including the use of long-range strategic bombers, attacking enemy air defense and command and control systems, gaining air

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<sup>43</sup> Weitz, "Why Russia and China Have Not Formed an Anti-American Alliance," 44.

<sup>44</sup> Sarah Lain, "The Bear and the Dragon: Same Old Suspicions or a real Pivot East?," *The RUSI Journal* Vol. 160, No. 1 (March 2015): 73.

<sup>45</sup> Flikke, 166.

<sup>46</sup> Blank, "The Context of Russo-Chinese Military Relations," 244.

<sup>47</sup> Blank, *The Dynamics of Russian Arms Sales to China*, 2.

superiority, and controlling maritime territory. The exercise, conducted under the auspices of the SCO, involved approximately 9,000 troops (1,800 Russian, 7,200 Chinese) and included military and political consultations and amphibious and airborne landings, all based upon a scenario of Russia and China conducting a combined operation to assist a third state battling terrorist separatists.<sup>48</sup> Although the exercises were billed as counter-terrorism, they had a decidedly conventional flavor.<sup>49</sup> The exercise was a first step. The level of interoperability between the Russian and Chinese forces was low. They operated in the same place at the same time, but their operations were not synchronized in a way that the U.S. and its allies conduct exercises.<sup>50</sup> Nevertheless, the exercise represented the first large scale military cooperation between the two nations since the Soviets supported China during the Korean War.

Since 2005, the two countries have engaged in numerous combined exercises, either bilaterally or under the auspices of the SCO. The two countries now execute at least one bilateral exercise annually. In July 2013, China and Russia executed a large scale land and maritime exercise which 130 aircraft, 70 ships, 5,000 tanks, and at least 160,000 troops.<sup>51</sup> The forces conducted the exercise—named Joint Sea 2013—in the Sea of Japan, with the scenario of a Japanese invasion, sending a less than subtle signal to both the United States and Japan.<sup>52</sup> In May 2014, China and Russia conducted an exercise in the South China Sea, involving more than a dozen ships and two submarines.

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<sup>48</sup> Ryan, 190-191.

<sup>49</sup> Jing-Yun Hsu and Jenn-Jaw Soong, “Development of China-Russia Relations (1949-2011),” *The Chinese Economy* Vol. 47, No. 3 (May-June 2014): 77.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Weitz, *China-Russia Security Relations: Strategic Parallelism without Partnership or Passion?* (Washington DC: Strategic Studies Institute, 2008), 35.

<sup>51</sup> Blank, “The Context of Russo-Chinese Military Relations,” 244.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 247.



In May 2014, the two nations conducted a week-long exercise in the East China Sea dubbed “Maritime Cooperation 2014.” The event set a new standard for interoperability and realism in Chinese-Russian exercises as the two navies conducted drills in anchor defense, anti-submarine warfare, air defense, joint escort, and search and rescue.<sup>53</sup> A year later, Russia and China conducted another joint naval exercise, this time in the Mediterranean Sea, sending a signal to the rest of the world about power projection capabilities.

In 2016, the Chinese and Russians conducted two joint exercises. The first, conducted in May 2016, featured the two militaries holding an unprecedented joint command/headquarters missile defense exercise. The event, named “Aerospace Security 2016,” was held in Moscow with the goal of practicing joint interoperability between Russian and Chinese air defense and missile defense groups for territorial defense against accidental and hostile ballistic and cruise missile strikes.<sup>54</sup> Later on, in September, the two nations conducted their annual joint naval exercise, this time in the South China Sea.

These exercises are all particularly noteworthy, as they represent an aberration in the historical Chinese-Russian security relationship. The exercises have value for both sides. They reinforce their strategic partnership in a significantly visible way, strengthening their military-to-military ties and interoperability, while signaling their partnership to the United States and its allies. Recently, Chinese analysts have lauded these exercises as an appropriate response to the U.S. “pivot to the Pacific” undertaken by the Obama administration, which they see as strategically squeezing Russia and seeking

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<sup>53</sup> Yu Bin, “Strategic Insights: The Ukraine Crisis and the Emerging Sino-Russian Political Alliance,” *Strategic Studies Institute* (September 9, 2014). <http://strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/index.cfm/articles/Ukraine-Crises-Sino-Russian-Political-Alliance/2014/09/09> (accessed December 21, 2016).

<sup>54</sup> Bin, “China-Russia Relations: Politics of Reluctant Allies,” 129.

to contain China.<sup>55</sup> The Russians also use these exercises as a way to sustain their arms sales to China. For example, during the exercise in 2005, the Russians included the participation of Tu-22M and Tu-95 strategic bombers to spur the Chinese to buy them.<sup>56</sup>

### **Military-to-Military Contacts and Exchanges**

In addition to exercises and arms sales over the past twenty five years, Chinese and Russian defense cooperation has included high-level conferences and exchanges of officers for military education. From 1992 to 2009, China and Russia engaged in fifty high-level military visits (28 occurred in China, 22 in Russia), including visits between the Defense Ministers of each country.<sup>57</sup> Numerous mid-level contacts also occur. Meetings between commanders of neighboring military units along the border have increased in frequency.<sup>58</sup>

Thousands of Chinese military personnel have studied in Russia while numerous Russian officers have received shorter duration training in China at the National Defense University.<sup>59</sup> From 1991 to 1997, more than 5,200 Russian advisers went to China and more than 1,600 Chinese defense personnel graduated from Russia's military academies.<sup>60</sup> Russia has also provided scientists to work in China to assist the Chinese in the development of military technologies. For example, in 1993, more than one thousand Russian military experts were in China, including three hundred that were visiting

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<sup>55</sup> Blank, "The Context of Russo-Chinese Military Relations," 249.

<sup>56</sup> Ryan, 191.

<sup>57</sup> Yuan, 210-213.

<sup>58</sup> Blank, *The Dynamics of Russian Arms Sales to China*, 34.

<sup>59</sup> Ying, 98.

<sup>60</sup> Richard Weitz, "Why Russia and China Have Not Formed an Anti-American Alliance," 45.

Chinese institutions on a long term basis.<sup>61</sup> Such exchanges increase their ability to operate effectively together, while strengthening defense ties.

### The Diplomatic Relationship

Russia and China have found utility in supporting and reinforcing each other on the international stage through diplomacy and by leveraging their positions in international bodies like the U.N. Security Council. In areas where they agree, Russia and China will echo each other in their statements to the world. In 1998, for example, both Russia and China issued indignant statements against the U.S. bombing of Iraq during Operation Desert Fox. China and Russia both openly expressed opposition for NATO actions in Kosovo in 1999, as well as for the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq in 2003. When either country experiences a strain in relations with the U.S. and the West, they leverage their relationship with the other in reaction. After the U.S. erroneously bombed the Chinese embassy in Belgrade in 1999, Beijing suspended military-to-military contacts and human rights discussions with the U.S. and simultaneously increased its strategic cooperation with Russia, to include the activation of a hotline between the two countries.<sup>62</sup>

These reactions represented Russian and Chinese apprehension that Western ventures like those in the former Yugoslavia and Iraq will set a precedent for interference in their internal affairs. Both nations reject the concept that “human rights are superior to sovereignty.”<sup>63</sup> China is particularly sensitive to outside interference in their internal

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<sup>61</sup> Joseph Y.S. Cheng, 492.

<sup>62</sup> Odgaard, 45.

<sup>63</sup> Yeung and Bjelakovic, 252.

issues, especially concerning separatist movements like in Tibet, Xinjiang, and Taiwan, to the point of objecting, at least privately, to Russian actions in support of separatists in Georgia and Ukraine. Russia and China's permanent seats on the U.N. Security Council put them in position to support each other in hindering the West's attempts to deter their actions. Their defense of national sovereignty above all else is also pragmatic because the authoritarian governments of China and Russia wish to shield their internal abuses from Western criticism, and they generally do not publicly criticize or comment on each other's policies.<sup>64</sup>

Russian and Chinese leaders regularly state their preference for a multi-polar world and occasionally make formal joint public statements to that end. For example, in June, 2016, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited China for the fifteenth time to date during his rule. The meeting resulted in a joint government statement on strategic stability that reiterated their opposition to U.S./Western hegemonic tendencies, stating, without naming any specific countries, that "some countries and military-political alliances seek decisive advantage in military and relevant technology, so as to serve their own interests through the use or threat of use of force in international affairs....[resulting] in an out-of-control growth of military power that shook the global strategic stability system."<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Richard Weitz, "Superpower Symbiosis," *World Affairs*. Vol. 175, No. 4 (November/December 2012): 73.

<sup>65</sup> Bin, "China-Russia Relations: Politics of Reluctant Allies," 130.

## **Chapter 4: The Case Against a Formal Alliance**

Many observers have examined the Russian-Chinese relationship in an effort to determine if their strategic partnership will eventually transform into a formal military alliance, potentially creating a new bipolar world with the United States and NATO on one side, and a China/Russia bloc on the other. A formal alliance is quite unlikely based upon a number of factors. There are many practical reasons that such an alliance would actually work against both Chinese and Russian interests in the long run, such as either country sacrificing its bilateral relationship with the U.S. in favor of an alliance. There is also a long history of mistrust between these two countries, as well as basic cultural incompatibility which precludes a truly close relationship based upon mutual respect and trust. Additionally, there are numerous areas in which Chinese and Russian interests diverge, particularly Asian regional issues. Consequently, the Chinese and Russian governments work against each other in pursuit of their conflicting interests. Russia's self-image is also an impediment to a full blown military alliance with China.

Both China and Russia value their bilateral relationships with the United States. Though both have resisted U.S. hegemony and together called for a multipolar world, both acknowledge the importance of diplomatic, economic, and security relations with the Americans. This sentiment is clearly stated in their public national security documents of 2015.<sup>1</sup> The role of Western trade, investment, and technology is a strong impediment to a Chinese-Russian military alliance, which would fundamentally turn both

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<sup>1</sup> The Russian National Security Strategy of 2015 states that "the Russian Federation is interested in establishing a full-fledged partnership with the United States," while China's National Military Strategy of 2015 highlights that it will conform "to the new model of major-country relations between [China and the U.S.], strengthen defense dialogues, exchanges and cooperation."

nations against the West.<sup>2</sup> The globally interconnected economy makes such a divorce from the West a contravention of the interests of both Russia and China.

Both nations are realist in their outlook and in how they approach their strategic relationships, and both nations have at times made their bilateral relationship a function of their relationships with the United States. Presently, Russia's relationship with the U.S. is under strain and it has determined that its national interests are best served by aligning with China on issues of global security management. However, Russia is also wary of rising China's potential to dominate their bilateral relationship.<sup>3</sup> Russia is concerned that it will become the junior partner in its relationship with China, relegated to providing natural resources to its giant, developing neighbor.<sup>4</sup> In the 1970s, China normalized its relationship with the U.S. in an effort to balance the Soviet Union, with whom it had a poor relationship. Should relations with the Russians turn sour today, the Chinese would undoubtedly leverage their relationship with the U.S. to mitigate against any Russian threat.

Even with today's relatively strong Russian-Chinese relationship, China still pursues strong bilateral relations with the United States. Prior to a Chinese-American summit in 2013, the governments of both nations openly supported a new model of bilateral relations between the two nations.<sup>5</sup> For its part, Russia also conducts its relations with the U.S. without always considering China. Beijing was particularly caught off guard when Putin accepted the U.S. abrogation of the ABM Treaty in 2002, without any

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<sup>2</sup> Andrew C. Kuchins, *Russia after the Fall* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2002), 219.

<sup>3</sup> Liselotte Odgaard, *China and Coexistence* (Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2012), 110.

<sup>4</sup> Niklas Swanstrom, "Sino-Russian Relations at the Start of the New Millennium in Central Asia and Beyond," *Journal of Contemporary China*. Vol. 23, No. 87 (May 2014): 484.

<sup>5</sup> Stephen Blank, "The Context of Russo-Chinese Military Relations," *American Foreign Policy Interests* Vol. 35, No. 5 (September/October 2013): 251.

corresponding American concessions and felt deceived and betrayed as they viewed any future U.S. missile defense capabilities as more likely aimed at China's limited nuclear capabilities.<sup>6</sup>

Longstanding Chinese outlook also precludes a formal alliance with Russia. China has repeatedly affirmed one of what it calls its "three noes"—no alliances. China ignored a Russian suggestion of a tripartite alliance between China, Russia, and India as it operates on the international stage.<sup>7</sup> China still subscribes to its principles of peaceful coexistence which precludes it from becoming entangled in military alliances and interfering in the internal affairs of other nations.

A military alliance usually includes a provision for mutual defense. Russia and China likely see a mutual defense pact as contrary to their national interests. It is doubtful that Russia desires to be dragged into a military confrontation with the U.S. over Taiwan, nor does China condone nor wish to be involved in Russia's recent military adventures, such as in Georgia<sup>8</sup> and Ukraine. Both countries are also aware that a Chinese-Russian alliance would likely cause their neighbors to move toward the U.S. on security issues and military relationships, potentially to the detriment of China and Russia.<sup>9</sup>

Although Chinese and Russian leaders publicly extoll the virtues of their strategic partnership, there are numerous areas in which their national interests are at odds and actions they have taken indicate an underlying weakness in their relationship. Despite their strategic partnership, Russia still engages in balancing behavior toward China.

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<sup>6</sup> Christina Yeung and Nebojsa Bjelakovic, "The Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: Views from Beijing and Moscow," *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 2 (April-June 2010): 254.

<sup>7</sup> Richard Weitz, "Why Russia and China Have Not Formed an Anti-American Alliance," *Naval War College Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4 (2003): 52-53.

<sup>8</sup> James Bellacqua, "Contemporary Sino-Russian Relations: Thirteen Years of a 'Strategic Partnership'," In *The Future of China-Russia Relations* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010): 8-9.

<sup>9</sup> Yeung and Bjelakovic, 256-257.

Russia has maintained strong relations with India as a balance against Chinese regional ambitions<sup>10</sup> and Chinese media reports have noted that Russia is more cautious in its arms sales to China than it is with other countries such as India and Vietnam.<sup>11</sup> China's ministry of foreign affairs has criticized potential Russian-Vietnamese energy projects<sup>12</sup> while Russia has backed Vietnam against China in its maritime territorial claims, which hinder Russia's offshore energy projects in the area.<sup>13</sup> China has also expressed disapproval of Russia's military cooperation with Vietnam, with Chinese media reports in 2012 calling Russia's policies "unrighteous" and warning Russia against its cooperation with "ill-doers."<sup>14</sup>

China firmly proclaims that nations should not interfere in the internal affairs of other nations. Russia has echoed this sentiment when joining with China in a chorus against the actions of a hegemonic U.S. and in their desire for a multipolar world. However, Russia has failed to adhere to this precept with some of its recent actions. Although not publicly stated, Beijing did not approve of Russia's military action which separated the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia.<sup>15</sup> China has taken no official position against the Russian annexation of Crimea or its actions in

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<sup>10</sup> Nishtha Kaushiki and Hilal Ramzan, "Sino-Russo Strategic Synergy in International Politics and Emerging Contours of South Asian Equilibrium: an Indian Perspective," *Journal of International and Area Studies*. Vol. 22, No. 2 (2015): 11.

<sup>11</sup> Jing-Dong Yuan, "Sino-Russian Defense Ties: The View from Beijing," In *The Future of China-Russia Relations* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 217.

<sup>12</sup> Richard Weitz, "Can Vladimir Putin Solve Russia's China Dilemma?" *World Politics Review* (June 21, 2016), <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/19139/can-vladimir-putin-solve-russia-s-china-dilemma> (accessed December 19, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> Richard Weitz, "Superpower Symbiosis," *World Affairs*. Vol. 175, No. 4 (November/December 2012): 74.

<sup>14</sup> Sarah Lain, "The Bear and the Dragon: Same Old Suspicion or a real Pivot East?," *The RUSI Journal* Vol. 160, No. 1 (March 2015): 73-74.

<sup>15</sup> Martin Jacques, *When China Rules the World* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009), 338.



Ukraine<sup>16</sup>, but these actions clearly violate the mandate of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. Those actions involved Russian separatists in Georgia and the Ukraine, and China is deeply concerned with such separatism as it impacts its interests in keeping Taiwan, Xinjiang, and Tibet.<sup>17</sup>

China and Russia also have some diverging economic interests. Russia has been quite reluctant to let energy pipelines transit solely through China for fear of Chinese interests controlling sales and transit of energy, and both nations are competing for overland trade routes and viewing infrastructure investments in trade routes by the other country as a loss in a zero-sum game.<sup>18</sup> Russia viewed Xi Jinping's announcement in 2013 of his "Silk Road Economic Belt" concept with negativity, if not hostility, as it was seen to compete with Russia's interests in its traditional sphere of influence.<sup>19</sup>

An undercurrent of distrust exists in the Chinese-Russian relationship. Given their history, such mistrust is understandable. China believes that Russia has the propensity to lean towards and focus on the West, and that Russian relations with the West will always take precedence over their relations with China.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, declining Russia views rising China with suspicion, which manifests itself in how it trains and focuses its armed forces. For example, in Russian military exercises in 2010 and 2013, the scenario postulated the United States, Japan, and China as enemies,<sup>21</sup> with the 2010 exercise including a simulated tactical nuclear launch against PLA forces.<sup>22</sup> Despite the acrimony

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<sup>16</sup> Anthony H. Cordesman, *Chinese Strategy and Military Power in 2014* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2014), 64.

<sup>17</sup> Swanstrom, 483.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 487-489.

<sup>19</sup> Yu Bin, "China-Russia Relations: Politics of Reluctant Allies," *Comparative Connections*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (September 2016): 137.

<sup>20</sup> Odgaard, 103-104.

<sup>21</sup> Blank, "The Context of Russo-Chinese Military Relations," 251.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

with NATO and the West, and its actions in Ukraine, the Russian military, like the U.S., has also rebalanced to the Asia, with Russia's newest weapons typically flowing to units in eastern Russia.<sup>23</sup> Russia's distrust of China as it rises is also manifest in its reluctance to sell its most advanced weapon systems to China because of concern over a potential future Chinese security threat to its interests.<sup>24</sup>

China and Russia are largely incompatible in a cultural sense. Their relationship is driven by strategic level elites and lacks support at the grassroots.<sup>25</sup> The notion of Chinese preeminence in world affairs is an alien concept for the Russian people and elites who have historically regarded China as weak and often in a subordinate role to Russia.<sup>26</sup> Each society harbors ingrained stereotypes about the other, and ties at the societal level are minimal. Elites in China and Russia do not send their children to university in Moscow and Beijing, but rather to Europe and the United States. The Chinese media is critical of Russian treatment of Chinese citizens working in Russia, while Russians complain about Chinese pollution and large-scale immigration in the Russian Far East.<sup>27</sup>

Chinese migration into the Russian Far East is of concern to Russia and is a source of tension. The Russian population in the Far East is approximately 7.5 million people, while the Chinese population in the neighboring provinces is approximately 112 million.<sup>28</sup> As military presence was reduced on both sides of the border, greater numbers of Chinese citizens have crossed the border looking for work or to ply their trade. Russian citizens in the Far East are more likely to view China as a competitor and long term

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<sup>23</sup> Weitz, "Superpower Symbiosis," 76.

<sup>24</sup> Yuan, 220.

<sup>25</sup> Jing-Yun Hsu and Jenn-Jaw Soong, "Development of China-Russia Relations (1949-2011)," *The Chinese Economy* Vol. 47, No. 3 (May-June 2014): 79.

<sup>26</sup> Odgaard, 105.

<sup>27</sup> Weitz, "Superpower Symbiosis," 74.

<sup>28</sup> Jacques, 336.

threat.<sup>29</sup> Estimates of the number of Chinese people in Russia range from as low as 134,000 to as high as 2,000,000,<sup>30</sup> and some demographic projections predict that Chinese will be the second largest minority ethnic group in Russia by 2051.<sup>31</sup> Some Russians see this Chinese infusion into the Far East as a classic example of how China conquers territory.<sup>32</sup> In fact, there is some sentiment on the Chinese side to believe that some of Russia's Far Eastern lands, gained during "unequal treaties" in the nineteenth century, are rightfully China's, and there is a desire on the part of the Chinese population to reclaim these lands, although this position is not officially shared by the Chinese government.<sup>33</sup> Russians in the Far East have told tales of Chinese tourists proclaiming they had come to see "their land," and a poll conducted in Primorski Krai in 2000 noted that 74 per cent of Far Eastern Russians believe China will ultimately annex part or all of their territory.<sup>34</sup>

Another reason that a Chinese-Russian alliance is unlikely is Russia's self-image. Russians see themselves as a great power on the world stage. Militarily, for the most part, they are correct, particularly in light of their large nuclear arsenal. However, many metrics indicate that Russia is on the decline and simply does not have the capabilities to occupy a position similar to what the Soviet Union did. Russia has historically been the superior partner in its relations with China and its national identity will not accept

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<sup>29</sup> Andrew Kuchins, "Russian Perspectives on China," In *The Future of China-Russia Relations*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2010), 39.

<sup>30</sup> Herman Pirchner, Jr., "The Uncertain Future: Sino-Russian Relations in the Twenty-First Century," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (Fall 2008): 314-315.

<sup>31</sup> Jacques, 336.

<sup>32</sup> Odgaard, 109.

<sup>33</sup> Swanstrom, 484.

<sup>34</sup> Pirchner, 312.

occupying an inferior position in their bilateral relations.<sup>35</sup> Russian nationalism is alive and well, as Putin's rise and hold on power demonstrates.

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<sup>35</sup> Odgaard, 105.

## **Chapter 5: Conclusions/Implications for the United States**

China and Russia have gained from their improved relations in several ways. They have benefitted economically through increased trade, particularly with arms and raw material sales from Russia to China. They have been able to reduce focus on their shared border, applying those military resources to other areas of concern. They are also united in their opposition to a unipolar world led by the U.S. and are able to support each other on the international stage, to include votes on the U.N. Security Council. This arrangement has proven both convenient and mutually beneficial. They share a strong sense of national sovereignty and that outside actors have no business meddling in the internal affairs of nations.

Despite the rosy proclamations emanating from Moscow and Beijing concerning their bilateral ties, it is unlikely that their current strategic partnership will blossom into a formal military alliance. Russia and China both value their bilateral relationships with the U.S. and neither nation desires to upset the status quo with such a dramatic step as a China/Russia military bloc. Russian-Chinese security relations are at least partially a function of their individual bilateral relationships with the United States. Russia is ultimately more European in its outlook and desires to retain its influence as the dominant player in its near abroad of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet sphere. China clearly recognizes its own ascendance and desires to be the dominant regional power in Asia.

For all the handshakes and hugs between Chinese and Russian leaders, mistrust between the two countries still underlies their relations. China's long historical memory recalls the Russian imperialism that resulted in Chinese exploitation and humiliation through "unequal treaties." Russia has always viewed China as the weaker partner in their

relations. Times have changed, with China obviously on the rise and Russia clearly on the decline. This dynamic is troublesome to many Russian elites who fear the potential actions of an emboldened and powerful China. Russia will find it difficult to accept being a junior partner in its bilateral relationship with China, which could push it toward the West as a balancing measure. Even in recent years, Russian military leaders cannot help but consider China to be a long term threat and have trained their forces based, at least in part, on that assumption. One must remember that the present period of relative harmony is an aberration in the long, troubled history of China-Russia relations.

Culturally, Russia and China are not close, particularly at the grassroots societal level. Russians, generally xenophobic, are wary of Chinese migration into their Far East, which some see as the initial steps in an eventual annexation of Russian territory by China. This cultural incompatibility and general mistrust ultimately undermines the prospect for long term harmonious rapport between the Bear and the Dragon. The two nations are close today but it is all but impossible to imagine Russia and China approaching something akin to the “special relationship” shared by the United States and Great Britain, for example.

The United States should monitor and be wary of Chinese-Russian security cooperation while cultivating its bilateral relations with each nation, seeking opportunities to leverage one against the other, as during the Cold War. Simultaneously, the United States should make every effort to maintain its qualitative military superiority over both China and Russia. The transition to the administration of President Trump in January 2017 has the distinct potential to change the character of the bilateral relationships the U.S. has with both countries. Those changes have the potential to alter

how China and Russia view each other. For example, some level of rapprochement between Moscow and Washington may cause some degree of cooling between Moscow and Beijing as the U.S. attempts to leverage Moscow in support of American interests with respect to China. In any event, any American administration must recognize the importance of the Bear and the Dragon and avoid driving them into a tighter embrace.

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